

As I shal seyn, assentyng to my loore,
And I shal make us sauf for everemoore?

They sworn and assenten, every man
To lyve with hire and dye, and by hire stonde;
And everich, in the beste wise he kan,
To strengthen hire shal alle his frendes fonde;
And she hath this emprise ytake on honde,
Which ye shal heren that I shal devyse,
And to hem alle she spak right in this wyse.

We shul first feyne us cristendom to take,
Coud water shal nat greve us but a life;
And I shal swiche a feeste and revel make,
That, as I trowe, I shal the sowdan quite;
for though his wyf be cristned never so white
She shal have nede to wasshe away the rede,
Though she a fontful water with hire lede!

O sowdanesse, roote of iniquitee!
Virago thou, Semyrame the secounde,
O serpent under femynynyte,
Lik to the serpent depe in helle ybounde.
O feyned womman, al that may confounde
Vertu and innocence, thurgh thy malice
Is bred in thee, as nest of every vice!

O Sathan, envious syn thilke day
That thou were chaced from oure heritage,
Wel knowestow to wommen the olde way!
Thou madest Eva brynge us in servage,
Thou wolt fordoon this cristen mariage.
Thyn instrument so, weylawey the while!
Makestow of wommen, when thou wolt bigile.

This sowdanesse, whom I thus blame & warye,
Let prively hire conseil goon hire way.
What sholde I in this tale lenger tarye?
She rydeth to the sowdan on a day,
And seyde hym that she wolde reneye hir lay,
And cristendom of preestes handes fonge,
Repentyng hire she hethen was so longe;

Bisechyng hym to doon hire that honour,
That she moste han the cristen folk to feeste;
To plesen hem, I wol do my labour.
The sowdan seith, I wol doon at youre heeste;
And knelyng, thanketh hire of that requeste;
So glad he was, he nyste what to seye;
She kiste hir sone, and hoome she gooth hir weye.

Explicit pars prima. Sequitur pars secunda.



ARRIVED been this cristen
folk to londe,
In Surrye, with a greet
solempne route;
And hastifliche this sowdan
sente his sonde,
first to his mooder, and all
the regne aboute,
And seyde his wyf was
comen, oute of doute,
And preyde hire for to ryde agayne the queene,
The honour of his regne to susteene.

Greet was the prees, and riche was tharray
Of Surryens and Romayns met yfeere;
The mooder of the sowdan, riche and gay,
Receyveth hire with al so glad a cheere
As any mooder myghte hir doghter deere,
And to the nexte citee ther bisyde,
A softe paas solempnely they ryde.

Noght trowe I the triumphe of Julius,
Of which that Lucan maketh swich a boost,
Was roialler, ne moore curius,
Than was thassemblee of this blisful hoost;
But this scorpioun, this wikked goost,
The sowdanesse, for all hire flatteryng,
Caste under this ful mortally to styng.

The sowdan comth hymself soone after this
So roially, that wonder is to telle,
And welcometh hire with alle joye and blis;
And thus in murthe and joye I lete hem dwelle;
The fruyt of this matiere is that I telle.
Whan tyme cam men thoughte it for the beste,
The revel stynte, and men goon to hir reste.

The tyme cam, this olde sowdanesse
Ordeyned hath this feeste of which I tolde,
And to the feeste cristen folk hem dresse
In general, ye, bothe yonge and olde.
Heere may men feeste and roialtee biholde,
And deyntees mo than I kan yow devyse,
But all to deere they boghte it, er they ryse.

O sodeyn wo! that evere art successour
To worldly blisse, spreind with bitteresse;
Thende of the joy of oure worldly labour;
Wo occupieth the fyn of oure gladnesse.
Herke this conseil, for thy sikernesse,
Upon thy glade day have in thy mynde
The unwar wo or harm that comth bihynde.

for soothly for to tellen at o word,
The sowdan and the cristen everichone
Been al tohewe and stiked at the bord,
But it were oonly dame Custance allone.
This olde sowdanesse, cursed krone,
Hath with hir freendes doon this cursed dede,
for she hirself wolde all the contree lede.

Ne ther was Surryen noon, that was converted,
That of the conseil of the sowdan woot,
That he nas al tohewe er he asterted,
And Custance han they take anon, foot/hoot
And in a ship all steereless, God woot,
They han hir set and biddeth hire lerne saille
Out of Surrye, agaynward to Ytaille.

A certein tresor that she with hire ladde,
And, sooth to seyn, vitaille greet plente,
They han hire yeven, and clothes eek she hadde,
And forth she sailleth in the salte see.
O my Custance, ful of benigynitee,
O emperours yonge doghter deere,
He that is lord of fortune be thy steere!

She blesseth hire, and with ful pitous voys,
Unto the croys of Crist thus seyde she:
O cleere, O weleful auter, hooly croys,
Reed of the lambes blood, ful of pitee,
That wesshe the world fro the olde iniquitee,
Me fro the feend, and fro his clawes kepe,
That day that I shal drenchen in the depe.

Victorious tree, proteccioun of trewe,
That oonly worthy were for to bere
The kyng of hevene with his woundes newe,
The white lamb that hurt was with the spere,
flemere of feendes out of hym and here,
On which thy lymes feithfully extenden,
Me helpe, and yif me myght my lyf tamenden.

ERES and dayes fleteth this creature
Thurghout the see of Grece unto the
Straye
Of Marrok, as it was hire aventure.
On many a sory meel now may she bayte;
After hir deeth ful often may she wayte,
Er that the wilde waves wol hire dryve
Unto the place ther she shal arryve.

Men myghten asken why she was nat slayn
Eek at the feeste, who myghte hir body save?
And I answer to that demande agayn,
Who saved Danyel in the horrible cave,
Ther every wight save he, maister and knave,
Was with the leoun frete, er he asterte?
No wight but God, that he bar in his herte.

God liste to shewe his wonderful myracle
In hire, for we sholde seen his myghty werkis;
Crist, which that is to every harm triacle,
By certein meenes ofte, as knowen clerkis,
Dooth thyng for certein ende that ful derk is
To mannes wit, that for oure ignorance
Ne konne noght knowe his prudent purveiance.

Now sith she was nat at the feeste yslawe,
Who kepte hire fro the drenchyng in the see?
Who kepte Jonas in the fisshes mawe,
Til he was spouted up at Nynyvee?
Wel may men knowe it was no wight but he
That kepte peple Ebrayk from hir drenchyng,
With drye feet thurghout the see passyng.

Who bad the foure spirites of tempest,
That power han tanyen lond and see,
Bothe north and south, and also west and east,
Anoyeth neither see, ne land, ne tree?
Soothly the comandour of that was he
That fro the tempest ay this womman kepte
As wel whan that she wook as whan she slepte.

Where myghte this womman mete & drynke have
Thre yer and moore? How lasteth hire vitaille?
Who fedde the Egypcien Marie in the cave,
Or in desert? No wight but Crist, sans faille.
fye thousand folk it was as greet mervaille
With loves fyve and fisshes two to feede.
God sente his foyson at hir grete neede.

HE dryveth forth into oure occian,
Thurghout oure wilde see, til atte laste
Under an hoolde, that nempnen I ne kan,
fer in Northumberlond the wawe hire caste,
And in the sond hir ship stiked so faste,
That thennes wolde it noght of ala tyde,
The wyl of Crist was that she sholde abyde.

The constable of the castel down is fare
To seen this wrak, and al the ship he soghte,
And foond this wery womman, ful of care;
He foond also the tresor that she broghte,
In hir langage mercy she bisoghte,
The lyf out of hire body for to twynne,
Hire to delivere of wo that she was inne.

A maner Latyn corrupt was hir speche,
But algates therby was she understonde;
The constable, whan hym lyst no lenger seche,
This woful womman broghte he to the londe;
She kneleth down, and thanketh Goddes sonde;
But what she was, she wolde no man seye,
for foul ne fair, though that she sholde deye.

She seyde she was so mazed in the see
That she forgat hir mynde, by hir trouthe.
The constable hath of hire so greet pitee,
And eek his wyf, that they wepen for routhe.
She was so diligent, withouten slouth,
To serve and plesen everich in that place,
That alle hir loven that looken in hir face.

This constable and dame Hermengyld, his wyf,
Were payens, and that contree everywhere;
But Hermengyld loved hire right as hir lyf,
And Custance hath so longe sojourned there,
In orisons, with many a bitter teere,
Til Jhesu hath converted, thurgh his grace,
Dame Hermengyld, constablesse of that place.

In al that lond no cristen dorste route,
Alle cristen folk been fled fro that contree
Thurgh payens, that conquereden al aboute
The plagis of the North, by land and see.
To Walys fledde the cristyanytee
Of olde Britons, dwellyng in this ile;
Ther was hir refut for the meene while.

But yet nere cristene Britons so exiled
That ther nere somme, that in hir privetee
Honoured Crist, and hethen folk bigiled;
And ny the castel swiche ther dwelten thre.
That oon of hem was blynd and myghte nat see
But it were with thilke eyen of his mynde,
With whiche men seen, after that they ben blynde.

Bright was the sonne as in that someres day,
for which the constable and his wyf also
And Custance, han ytake the righte way
Toward the see, a furlong wey or two,
To pleyen and to romen to and fro;
And in hir walk this blynde man they mette,
Croked and oold, with eyen feste yshette.